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November 24, 1978

MEMORANDUM

TO: ARA/CAR - Richard McCoy

FROM: ARA/PPC - Tim Dunn

SUBJECT: Responses to Congressman Zablocki's November 21 Letter to Secretary Vance on the Peoples Temple

The following responses based on information available to me, are keyed to the questions in the Congressman's letter to the Secretary.

1. The Department and the Embassy were not aware of any threat posed to Congressman Ryan's Delegation by Jonestown residents. There was obvious concern about alleged activities at the settlement which had prompted the Delegations trip. Embassy officials, however, had visited the community on several occasions without difficulties and without any fear of hostile treatment by the residents. The most serious potential problem which the Department and the Codel envisaged was the logistical one of visiting a remote area. The Codel indicated in meetings with Department officials that they understood the problems that could arise,

but based on past experience with the Peoples Temple, no one anticipated the tragedy which subsequently occurred.

2. Beginning September 15, 1978 when Congressman Ryan met with Assistant Secretary Vaky and members of his staff, the Department and our Embassy in Guyana assisted the Congressman. The Guyana Desk Officer, and members of the Offices of Special Consular Services and the Assistant Legal Advisor for Consular Affairs, also were involved in frequent consultations with the Codel. The Briefings were held to acquaint the Codel with the information available to the Department concerning the background of the Peoples Temple, its probable reaction to the visit, and the logistical problems of a trip to that isolated area of Guyana.

The Department and the Embassy had no evidence other than one or two shotguns that weapons were present in Jonestown. We did advise the Codel to seek the prior approval of the Peoples Temple to visit with the settlement with members of the press and private citizens, in order to assure access to what was private property.

Permission to visit Jonestown was arranged through the Peoples Temple attorneys and indicated at least an acquiescent attitude on the part of the residents. Also, as noted, Embassy officials had visited the settlement several times without problems. A Department Officer further suggested that the Congressman take a psychiatrist with him in order to study the situation and attitudes of Jonestown. This suggestion was not followed. On November 9, the Congressman's Legal Aide and a member of the HIRC staff met with representatives of the Office of Caribbean Affairs, the Inter-American and Consular Affairs Bureaus and the Legal Advisor's Office to discuss legal aspects of the Congressional visit. The principle points of discussion were the Privacy Act implications concerning the Congressional Committee's right to information and access to individuals and their files; any other prerogatives that the committee might be entitled to by treaty or international comity; and privileges available under the Vienna Consular Convention in force. The logistical problems to

be faced in making the trip to Jonestown were thoroughly discussed. There was also general discussion concerning the personality and psychological aspects of mind control techniques concerning religious groups of this type.

On November 13, the Congressman, his Legal Aide, and two HIRC staff members, accompanied by two former Peoples Temple members, and a relative of a Jonestown resident, met with Department officials to discuss further that situation in Jonestown and the nature of the Peoples Temple and its leader. At the end of the meeting, Congressman Ryan said that he owed it to his constituents and to the other San Francisco Bay area Congressmen to visit Jonestown and investigate for himself.

3. The Embassy made the usual requests that the Guyanese Government facilitate the visit of a Congressional Delegation. Special protection for the Delegation was not provided because there was no perceived threat and the Delegation itself did not ask for protection. The GOG did give routine assistance

to the group (e.g. customs and immigration clearance) and undoubtedly would have provided security had it been requested. See Brief (Pg. 20).

4. In Georgetown, the Delegation had the use of Embassy and commercial communication facilities. In Port Kaituma .... was dependent on the settlement facilities. (elaborate with specifics on equipment; any special arrangements?).

5. Embassy officials first visited Jonestown in 1973 (who, why, what did they find?). In late August 1977 the Embassy received its first inquiry about the possibility that a specific Peoples Temple member was being held against her will in Jonestown. In response, a Consular Officer visited Jonestown on August 29 and spoke privately with the individual. She denied that there was any problem and said that she wished to remain at the settlement. At this time, the Officer also interviewed a member of the group, who had left the community unhindered, in the nearby town of Matthews Ridge. This person asked the Officer to arrange for his return to the United States. This was done at the Peoples Temple expense.

3. (Embassy has to respond) ~~Ken~~

4. The Codel had use of the Embassy communications facilities ~~[illegible]~~ when they were in Georgetown. However, the Codel was ~~advised~~ that communications were non-existent in ~~the~~ the Port Kaituma area except for the People's Temple facilities at Jonestown. The Embassy ~~does~~ did not have mobile communication equipment that could have been used to support the trip. ~~The Government of Guyana does not have any~~

5.

Afterwards, Embassy officials visited Jonestown four times in response to letters received from concerned relatives in the United States. During these visits, about 75 to 100 residents were interviewed, ~~(individually)~~. Of these, 40 to 50 were interviewed in an open field adjacent to the open air community center to prevent the conversation from being overheard and to encourage frankness. None of these persons made any complaint. The Consular Officer involved, aware of the allegations of intimidation, did not notice any signs of nervous or mental strain on these people. During each interview, the Officer offered to escort the individual from the camp. The offer was refused in every case. On each visit the Officer felt free to move about the settlement and was able to speak privately with residents.

6. See Brief (Pg. 3-5).

7. Neither the Department nor the Embassy ~~was aware~~ had indications of any quantity of firearms and ammunition in Jonestown. Our Consul had been told by Temple during his first visit to the Community had a cache of handguns. The GOG has strict arms control laws, but it also does not seem to have been aware of the presence of such weapons. As noted above, the Department met with members of the Delegation several times and On May 17 P.T. relatives informed our Consul there were two weapons at Jonestown. Information was furnished to Congressional

the Temple and alleging [illegible] attack by "mercenaries" hired by the Concerned Relatives. The Consul referred them to the GOG, P.T. discussed this with the Commissioner of Police.

provided them with all available information on the situation at Jonestown.

8. Investigations (what kind?) of the Peoples Temple were made by other U.S. Government agencies (which ones?), but the Department is not aware of any reports containing conclusive evidence of illegal activities of the Peoples Temple, or of any criminal charges or indictments brought against the organization.

9. The Embassy provided normal consular services to the Jonestown residents. Besides the visits to the settlement, Consular Officials met with Peoples Temple members on ~~several~~ many occasions at the Embassy in Georgetown. Under international law, the safety of U.S. residents and their property in Guyana is also a responsibility of the local Government, which is better able to provide such care. The GOG has always indicated its willingness to accept this responsibility and to cooperate with the Embassy when the need arises.

10. The Embassy had received reports, of which the Department was aware, from concerned relatives and former Peoples Temple members alleging that Peoples Temple members sometimes were subjected to acts of

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violence at the settlement. The Embassy, however, was not able to confirm these reports even after conducting interviews at Jonestown itself. The Embassy and the Department kept each other informed of all substantive findings and reports relating to the Peoples Temple. Beginning in late 1977, Department officials met a number of times with relatives and former Peoples Temple members to discuss allegations of physical and psychological mistreatment of Jonestown residents. Although no concrete evidence of these allegations was submitted, the Embassy was kept informed of these discussions so that a Consular Officer could attempt to investigate the charges during trips to Jonestown.

11. After receiving reports of violence, Embassy Officers consulted with Guyanese police authorities in Georgetown and in the District responsible for the settlement area to determine the veracity of the charges. The Embassy was advised by the Department that it would be inappropriate to formally request the GOG to investigate U.S. citizens since there was no specific, substantiated information available concerning alleged illegal activities at Jonestown. The Guyanese police

had been monitoring the Peoples Temple since June 1977 and had required police inspection of shipments bound for the settlement through Mabaruma (~~what about through other ports~~?). This and other police interested in the group failed to uncover any evidence of illegal or improper activity.

12. A Consular Officer interviewed two Peoples Temple members who wished to leave-one at Matthews Ridge (see response #5), and another at the Embassy in Georgetown in May 1978. Only the latter, Mrs. Deborah Layton Blakely (the sister of Larry Layton who has been charged with murder in Guyana for his role in the airstrip incident) expressed concern that the Peoples Temple would not allow her to leave. She did not, however, present any evidence for her fears. The Embassy assisted both of these persons to leave Guyana. Congressman Ryan was aware of these interviews and had met personally with Mrs. Blakely.

13. The Department did not consider restricting the passports of persons wishing to travel to Jonestown. The Limitations of 22 U.S.C. 211 (a) would not properly have been applied to such persons who were seeking to visit an area which was not officially restricted.

The lack of evidence of any illegal or dangerous activity in the area would have made the legality of such a restriction questionable as an arbitrary restraint of a citizen's right to travel.